



20.04.2020

PRESS RELEASE

Regarding re-opening bars during the COVID-19 pandemic

Sri Lanka has been able to control the COVID-19 pandemic effectively due to the timely and accurate decisions taken to curb the pandemic. The success we have achieved so far in controlling the pandemic was achieved as our leadership acted upon the recommendations of public health experts.

Experts and all who love our nation are astounded by the recent decision of the government to re-open bars along with relaxation of curfew. In the recommendations by public health specialists in "Exit strategy of COVID-19 epidemic in Sri Lanka Recommendations of the College of Community Physicians" it is clearly stated that bars and alcohol outlets should not be opened. Even without specialist knowledge, any individual can understand that opening bars is not an appropriate decision during this pandemic.

Re-opening bars against the recommendations of public health specialists will lead to the following consequences:

1. Alcohol consumption weakens the immune system leading to increased risk of contracting coronavirus among alcohol users.
2. Alcohol use can increase road traffic accidents from driving under the influence of alcohol, this will unnecessarily increase the burden on the healthcare system, doctors, nurses and hospital personnel, emergency services, law enforcement officers and public resources, which are already strained due to the pandemic.
3. Increasing of using alcohol as an excuse to domestic violence and public conflict will lead to further burdening of the healthcare system, emergency services and law enforcement.
4. Individuals who use alcohol in lower-socio economic levels spending money on alcohol will further increase the strain on these families.
5. Crowding near bars / alcohol outlets will hinder physical distancing measures.
6. Further obstruction to physical distancing as alcohol is generally consumed in groups.

It is unacceptable for the government who was acting on a scientific basis to address COVID-19 to now abandon all scientific evidence and re-open bars. This scheme conspired by the alcohol industry, certain government officials and certain politicians undermines the President's plan to rid the country of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Alcohol and Drug Information Centre (ADIC) expects the President will take urgent action against this scheme and safeguard the nation and all Sri Lankans.

Thank you.

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Executive Director